

Groundbreaking for Fries Fire Station

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December 30, 2009

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I am pleased to return to Fries today to mark the beginning of construction on the new Fries fire station. The relocation of the fire station outside of downtown Fries marks a turning point in our efforts to bring new life to the Town.

With the benefit of a federal grant of \$1 million, the current fire station located next to the New River in downtown Fries will be relocated to this site. Not only will this move provide the Fries Fire Department with a new and modern fire station, but it will provide space in Fries' scenic downtown area for new businesses.

The Town of Fries is truly an asset to Southwest Virginia. Its location on the New River and at the head of the New River Trail State Park makes it an ideal destination for visitors seeking opportunities for outdoor recreation and unparalleled views of the river. Additionally, the Town affords a unique cultural heritage as the home to many of our region's outstanding musicians and to some of the first recordings of the music of our region. It is now time for the Town of Fries to capitalize on its natural and cultural significance and realize the full potential of its tourism economy.

I am pleased to note that a cooperative effort among officials at the federal, state and local level is underway to achieve this goal. A revitalization plan has been developed for the Town which includes the redevelopment of the old mill site, the enhancement of the Town's recreational opportunities and efforts to develop new, tourism related businesses in the downtown area.

In 2005 we took a major step forward in this initiative when, at my request, Congress approved a federal grant of \$800,000 to reconstruct the former Fries train depot along former train bed that is now part of the New River Trail. The federal funding will serve as a visitors center to provide information about all of the cultural and recreational opportunities Fries offers. Construction on the new depot will begin in 2010, and I hope to join many of you here today for a groundbreaking ceremony at that time.

Today, we mark another major step in our efforts to bring new life to Fries. The relocation of the Fries Fire station will make available more space in downtown Fries for new locally owned small businesses. To assist in this effort, a federal grant of \$1 million has been provided through the federal Community Development Block Grant program. Additionally, the Appalachian Regional Commission has provided a federal grant of nearly \$200,000 for the project.

The Community Development Block Grant funds for the project have been provided as a result of the economic Recovery Act approved by Congress with my support earlier this year. The measure was created to stimulate the economy in the short term and provide a long term foundation for economic growth in our communities. The project that begins today will do just that.

The relocation of the fire station is not only an investment in the Fries Fire Department, but it also represents a major investment in the long term economic future of Fries. The movement of the fire station will dramatically change the landscape of downtown Fries and create new opportunities for small businesses which cater to the many visitors who already visit Fries to experience the New River Trail or the Town's cultural offerings.

The new fire station will be 11,000 square feet in size, and it will be able to accommodate twelve vehicles in six bays. The station will also include three offices, a kitchen and a training room. Members of the Fries Fire Department are generous members of the Fries community who often risk personal safety for the public good, and it is only fitting that they enjoy a modern and efficient facility to base their operations.

I would like to take the opportunity of these remarks to thank a number of individuals whose efforts are critical to the revitalization of the Town of Fries.

I would like to thank Marie Ison, Mayor of Fries, and the Fries Town Council for their leadership in the Town's revitalization.

I would also like to thank Dave Barrett and Brian Reed with the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission. Brian also serves as the Fries Town Manager. Their efforts on behalf of Fries have been instrumental to its progress.

I would also like to thank Bill Shelton and Jimmy Wallace with the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development. Though the Community Development Block Grant program is a federal program, it is administered by the state, and Bill Shelton and Jimmy Wallace have helped Southwest Virginia communities obtain these funds.

I would also like to recognize Todd Christensen, formerly with the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, who is the new Director of the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission. Todd has provided outstanding leadership in the development of our region's tourism economy, and I would like to thank him for his efforts.

Mike Maynard, Chair of the Blue Ridge Crossroads Economic Development Authority, and Ken McFadden, Director of the Authority, deserve our appreciation today for their work on behalf of Fries.

I also want to recognize Randy Lineberry, Chief of the Fries Fire Department, and the other members of the Department for their outstanding work.

Finally, I would like to thank my Project Manager, Derek Lyall, for his efforts on behalf of this project.

The Town of Fries is swiftly moving toward its future, and the relocation of the fire station is a major step toward this goal. The revitalization of Fries is an outstanding example of what can be accomplished when officials at all levels of government work in aid of a common

purpose. I want to thank all here today for their efforts, and I want to offer congratulations to the Fire Department members who will soon enjoy a new fire station.